

# The French initiative on environmental information of mass market products

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## Abstract

**Context and goals of the initiative** Following the “Grenelle de l’Environnement”, the French Parliament is currently discussing a project of law in which it is mentioned that environmental information of mass market products in France will be experimented on sale’s place. This experiment will begin from the 1st July 2011 and will last at least 1 year. After this experiment, the French parliament will assess the opportunity to generalise this information.

**ADEME** The French agency on environment and energy management was asked to lead the elaboration of methodologies to assess the environmental impacts of the mass market products and to develop a generic database that quantifies the environmental impacts of products to make the assessments possible.

The environmental information has to respect the following principles:

- Packaging and product system is studied;
- life cycle approach, from cradle to grave;
- multicriteria approach.

**Objective** The objective of this initiative is to allow the consumer to use the information concerning the environmental impacts of a product throughout its life cycle as a choice criterion when deciding on a purchase. This environmental communication must also allow comparison of products belonging to the same category and, when relevant, between product categories.

**Keywords** ADEME (French agency on environment and energy management) · Consumers · Database to quantify the environmental impacts of products · Environmental information · France · Life cycle approach · Multi-criteria approach · Packaging and product systems

## 1 Governance of the initiative

In order to develop environmental information of products, ADEME with AFNOR (French association for standardisation) have created the general platform in which we can find several working groups. This entity validates the methodologies issued from the different working groups.

The working groups were initiated in order to develop simplified methodologies per product category for the environmental impacts assessment of products. These working groups involve representative companies from industry, retailers, consultants in Life Cycle Assessment, non-governmental organisations, administrations, technical experts and consumer associations. The governance of the initiative is described in Fig. 1.

### 1.1 General platform

This platform adopted in July 2008 the repository of good practices which contains general principles for the

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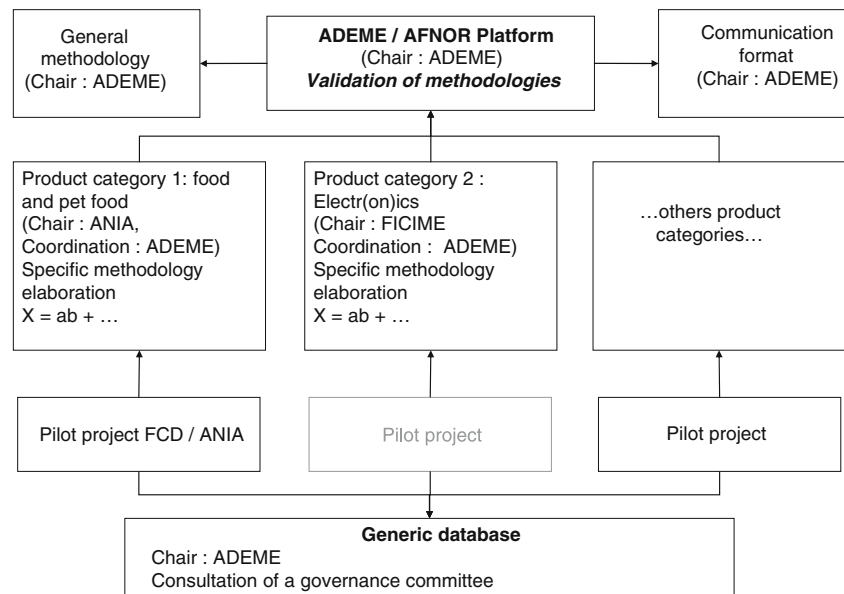
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**Fig. 1** Global functioning of the project



environmental communication on mass market products (BP X 30–323). The key points of this repository are as follows:

- Selected approach is Life Cycle Assessment (ISO 14040 and ISO 14044).
- Carbon footprint of products is required whatever the category.
- Environmental indicators are the same within a category (defined by the same functional unit).
- The number of indicators per category has to be limited.
- The communication format has to be harmonised in order to facilitate comparison.
- ADEME has to develop a public secondary database in order to simplify the assessments.

The general platform has also adopted the general methodology of environmental assessment for mass market products which is described below. This general methodology is available since September 2009.

## 1.2 Global methodology of assessment

The working group on global methodology developed an assessment method in order to quantify environmental impacts of products and systems in global way. This method is consistent with ISO 14040:2006 and ISO 14044:2006 standards.

This methodology contains requirements about key issues in LCA like end-of-life and recycling aspects, allocation rules, cut-off criteria, exclusions, etc. The BP X

30-323 document is available at the following website: [www.boutique.afnor.org](http://www.boutique.afnor.org)

## 1.3 Specific working groups

The specific working groups have been defined to have products of closed uses and closed environmental impacts. The rationale is that a consumer should have the same kind of indicators on products that he could want to compare. These working groups write the product category rules.

The objective of environmental communication in France is to cover all the mass market products. In order to respect this objective, the general platform has set up a list of 16 product categories which will be studied by the specific working groups. These categories are:

1. Food and pet food
2. Electric and electronic equipment, batteries
3. Cleaning products, products for garden
4. Body care
5. Clothes, textile, shoes, bags
6. Products for buildings, paintings...
7. Furniture
8. Cultural products, office products (papers, pens...)
9. Plates and dishes, cooking products
10. Sport equipment, camping material, games
11. Non electric equipment, ironmongery
12. Finance service
13. Automobile
14. Jewellery

15. Spare parts for automotive industry
16. Music instruments

#### 1.4 Pilot projects

Some of these groups are helped by pilot projects which study one or several products categories in order to feed thinking of stakeholders during the workshops.

The aim of the pilot projects is to provide methodological work to the specific working groups and essentially to provide learning by doing. These projects will give an idea on what is doable and what is not. The development of methodologies and the pilot projects are led in the same time to benefit from cross fertilisation. That should ensure that the methodologies that will be adopted will be applicable at a large scale.

These pilot projects began in January 2009 and cover product categories such as food and non-food products, detergents, shampoos, clothes, furniture, ironmongery and financial services.

#### 1.5 Communication format

The working group on communication format focuses on the different possibilities for the communication of environmental impacts to the consumers. This group elaborated a comparison table in which the advantages and disadvantages of each possibility are provided.

#### 1.6 Database development plan for 2009–2011

As specified in the guideline, one of the objectives of each working group is to define the amount of details that will be requested from producers in order to calculate the indicators they will have to show for their products (primary data; article 6). Secondary data from a public database made available by the ADEME will be used in case the data collection is irrelevant or not possible.

Several steps are necessary to set up such a database. A preliminary study is now being conducted by the ADEME with a consortium composed of BIO Intelligence Service and RDC Environment, aiming at defining a framework for the setting up of the database, both in terms of structure and content. The finalisation of this study, planned for March 2010, will allow launching the IT development of both the database and the calculation tool relying on it. In parallel, a management committee will be set up with an organisation based on the spirit of the “Grenelle de l’Environnement”, i.e.

based on four colleges representing administrations, NGOs, industries and experts. This committee will advise the ADEME on the data supply of the database. From end 2010, the ADEME will work with this committee to integrate data to the database by purchasing licence, through public call for tenders, from classic database developers, e.g. Ecoinvent, PE, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Bureau Véritas, or from technical institutes like the FCBA<sup>1</sup> for the furniture and wood products, or the CTC<sup>2</sup> for leather products. The database will then be gradually completed and updated to be able to answer to the needs of the environmental information of products for each economic sector.

In parallel the ADEME is having a specific approach for French farm products by developing its own database, through a 3-year project (2010–2013) conducted with INRA,<sup>3</sup> ART<sup>4</sup> and the French technical farming institutes aiming at producing about 50 LCAs for French productions of fruits, vegetables, crops, meat and dairy products.

## 2 Future plans and outlook

After the publication of the repository of good practices BP X 30-323 in July 2008 and the publication of its methodological annex in September 2009, ADEME/AFNOR platform hopes to release the first product category rules at the beginning of year 2010 which should cover detergents and shampoos.

This platform now plans to develop new product category rules (food, shoes, clothes, furniture...) and to work on the construction of the public generic database. In order to improve the repository of good practices, we also plan to review its methodological annex before summer 2010.

On 8 June 2010, a conference is also scheduled in Paris in order to present the development of methodologies and to deal with the procedures for implementing the environmental information of products for both businesses and consumers.

<sup>1</sup> Institut Technologique Forêt Cellulose Bois-construction Ameublement, [www.fcba.fr](http://www.fcba.fr)

<sup>2</sup> Centre Technique Cuir Chaussure Maroquinerie, [www.ctc.fr](http://www.ctc.fr)

<sup>3</sup> Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique: national institute for agricultural research (under the joint authority of the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries), [www.inra.fr/](http://www.inra.fr/)

<sup>4</sup> Agroscope Reckenholz-Tänikon: Swiss Federal Research Institute for sustainability in farming activities, [www.agroscope.admin.ch](http://www.agroscope.admin.ch)